



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Wokingham Borough Council

Smart Working

How Wokingham Borough Council has approached the design and implementation of Smart Working across the organisation.

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Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) wants to create a modern flexible workplace. More flexible working arrangements can play a vital role in organisational performance. WBC recognises that social, technological and economic developments have changed and influenced not only the way people think about working, but also the way in which customers want to receive services.

The Council has also been affected by Government cuts that have meant further reductions in spending, and a need to find new ways of delivering services more efficiently.

Aims

WBC began with one main aim for the project, and that was around cost savings and property reduction, however it was soon clear that Smart Working could tick a number of boxes.

The main aims are to improve work / life balance, with 'work' being in many cases not place dependent, realise financial savings by introducing a 2:1 desk policy that would allow a rationalisation of accommodation and generate revenue from vacated space that could potentially be rented to third parties. Aligned to this was a target to reduced storage by 50%.

Our Flexible
Workplace



This new way of working would also lead to contribute to corporate goals by supporting a reduction in congestion at peak travel times, delivering better services – whatever the weather!, and ensuring value for money by less reliance on costly office accommodation.



How are we implementing Smart Working?

Inter-disciplinary Project Team

WBC began their Smart Working journey around 2 years ago. A project team was set up which included people with expertise in Property, IT and HR – these were identified as the 3 key enablers to deliver on this project.

The project followed Prince 2 methodology and high levels of governance to ensure that good practice was being followed throughout. The aims and outcomes were agreed, and the biggest challenge was working to the 2:1 desk policy that had been set in order to accommodate more people in less space. There were around 1200 people to move to Smart Working and a deadline to vacate costly premises by April 2013.

A challenging project plan was created and an overall approach to deliver Smart Working to a 'pilot' area, before rolling out fully across the Council. This would allow the project team to check approaches, processes, technology and collate feedback on the experience from people.

As a result of the pilot, the overall Smart Working policy was amended to make it easier to understand and remove unnecessary categories of worker. There are now 2 categories: Fixed and Smart.

A communications and engagement plan was created to ensure that a variety of methods was adopted to communicate key corporate, and individually tailored messages to people.

Meeting with people

The project team began working with each Head of Service to agree a schedule of moves and approach. Thereafter face to face meetings were set up with lead Smart Working coordinators nominated from each service team. The meetings involved talking through the process and providing support on people issues, property and technology from the project team. Requirements were taken from every individual in terms of their technology and storage needs. Every Smart Worker would be using a laptop and crypto card to enable them to work from any location. People were shown what models and sizes of laptop were available for them to choose from.

Managers were simultaneously talking to their direct reports about their own personal ability to Smart Work i.e. Was it possible for them to work from home as an alternative location? The individuals' jobs were also reviewed in terms of whether the role could be delivered flexibly, or whether there was an

organisational requirement for the 'role' to be fixed in the office. Careful consideration needed to be given to this as the more 'fixed' office roles there were, the less scope there is to achieve the target of a 2:1 desk ratio.

An organisational decision was made to keep all administrators as fixed workers i.e. remain office based. These are a key group of people who help support services on a daily basis.



Teams are still located together, but now make use of un-personalised 'hot desks', or 'touch down points' if they are only in the office for a short period of time. The principle is that if people do not have meetings, or a need to occupy a desk in the office, then they should work from an alternative location.

Training People and managing change

Within the face to face meetings the project team listened to people's requirements, concerns and issues and gave as much advice and support as possible. The team also signposted people to other areas such as Managers Training courses on managing Smart Workers, employee e-learning modules about working remotely and the intranet where lots of practical advice and tips were held on protocols, policies, technology etc

Overall there are expectations of people that follow some basic principles:

- Be customer focused
- Accessible
- Flexible, adaptable and resilient
- Strong performance management
- Management by outputs
- Be more efficient through the use of technology

These are supported by an organisational People Strategy .

Challenges

The new way of working is a challenge for some. It is not only a change in working style, and in some cases process, but also a need to become more familiar in using different types of technology and hardware to work more productively.

Some people feel isolated working from other locations where they may not have contact with their colleagues, so additional interventions such as a buddy system and conference calling have been

Published on Flexibility.co.uk – the online journal of flexible and smart working, January 2013.

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implemented to mitigate this. Additional meeting rooms have also been created so that teams can still go to a central place to meet up.

Reducing storage has also been a challenge for some. WBC is in the middle of rolling out EDRMS (electronic document management) to enable us to be more efficient around storing documents and data, and using technology as an enabler for this.

Supporting Smart Working to work

To ensure that Smart Working 'works' staff and managers need to have some guidance around behaviours to ensure Service Delivery is efficient and effective despite changes to working patterns.

Hot-desking has encouraged staff to clear their desk once they've finished with it. This has resulted in staff not having to inhabit a work space surrounded by paper, files etc. Because hot-desking means Smart Workers no longer have a desk of their own, some Services have implemented a desk booking system to ensure staff who are in the office can use a desk.

Hot-desking and working at home has meant that people may not know where to find each other. There are a number of ways to avoid confusion, staff can update and open their outlook calendars to show where they are located along with the telephone number that they can be contacted on.

Flexibility will be restricted if the job/service involves regularly meeting customers or receiving phone calls. Staff and managers are encouraged to work together to produce a protocol. This may include staff having open calendars, contact numbers publicised within calendar and on the intranet, phones transferred to mobiles/VOiP phones, voicemail being used more effectively with alternative ways to contact.

Copies of example protocols are located on the intranet to share good practice ideas.

Results

To date, 286 people have moved to Smart Working with another 540 to move. There have been both financial and people-related achievements to date:

- The disposal of assets, aiming for **£500,000** capital receipt and year on year saving of approx **£500,000**
- A new Shared Legal Service model developed in partnership with another local authority where income from office space charges are being realised

People-related:

- **82%** of our people say they are more productive at home

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- 38% reduction in office space to date
- 286 people now Smart Working
- 540 people under the current programme of works
- Lesson learned review after Lower Ground Floor moves, resulted in a revised 'New Ways of Working policy'
- 65% of Wokingham Direct (call centre) staff work smartly
- 20% of these work permanently from home
- During the snow events of 2010 and 2011, they were able to staff the phones throughout their normal working hours of 8-6 with smart workers managing the extremities of the day
- By having a resilient workforce they have been able to manage customer/media enquiries in a timely manner, residents have been surprised with the levels of service they have received
- Sickness absence down to 5.43 FTE days per person, in areas where we are Smart Working that figures reduces to 3.54 days per person (Private Sector 6.5%)

Next Steps

The next stage of this project is to continue with the approach until the remaining staff have moved across to Smart Working. The target for this is April 2013 when WBC need to vacate costly premises.

Creation of a 'one stop shop' reception will also see those teams that work more closely with residents and service users located all in one place.

There is a need to look at measuring more areas in terms of achievement e.g.. productivity, reduction in travel time / miles, people retention. Further work will be conducted to gather evidence and feedback for measurement.

Comments from Smart Working Project Manager, Stephanie Maxwell

'As the Project Manager of Smart Working I would say that this has been a Project that evolved from a Property Rationalisation Project borne out of a desire to achieve financial savings but developed over time into part of a wider cultural change programme.'

With budgets reducing and demands increasing, as an organisation we have needed to explore alternative means of service delivery and a way of maximising the use of our property portfolio was identified as a way forward.

Some of the successes so far have been that we have disposed of assets securing a capital receipt of £500k, in addition we have made an ongoing revenue saving of £50k per annum.

The desk ratio of 2:1, though ambitious has been achievable in some areas, ensuring space has been created for staff from another location to move in around April next year. The space now occupied at Shute End is definitely more aesthetically pleasing. People are less dependent on paper files so storage is at a minimum.

Staff are overall happy with the change to their working practices and feel more empowered as they are managed by outputs not the time they are sat at a desk.

However, in moving to this new way of working there have been significant challenges along the way. Not least was buy in from some service areas and indeed managers. There was a culture of space according to status and perhaps staff also felt that with the likelihood of impending job cuts they needed to be in the office more not less. Gradually and with a significant amount of help from Organisational Development we are slowly winning hearts and minds.

The way forward we learned was to involve all stakeholders early and allow them to be part of the process, more doing with and less doing to. Property, HR and IT were initially the 3 identified departments to enable Smart Working, however, as the project gained pace and momentum we have invited various different people to join the Project Board (our IT partners for example), we have also widened our approach to include Communications and Finance.'

Andrea Jenkins, Strategic Communications Lead at Wokingham Borough Council

'When I was first asked to become a smart worker two years ago, I was nervous. As the lead officer for communications, and spending a vast majority of my time dealing with external communications and the media, I didn't see how it would work if I wasn't based in the office. I see myself as the eyes and ears of the organisation and I had concerns about keeping my finger on the pulse. How would I know what the burning issues are, or what media enquiries my team is dealing with?

I couldn't have been more wrong – my location doesn't impact on this. And I don't think our customers have noticed a difference in the service we provide. I am more productive. I plan my week around the days I work at home – for example the days when I have to write copy for our residents newsletter or proof it, I work at home as it's quiet and I can get my head down. I usually work at home two or three days a week. I find when I am back at Shute End, I really look forward to being there and seeing my colleagues. With our new look Intranet, I can keep up to date with the latest internal news or corporate blogs, and email is a good way to keep in touch with the team. With instant messenger being introduced next year that will also benefit internal communications. I am sure over time more and more internal social media channels will come on board.

With the rest of the team working more flexibly at different locations, one member of the team is in the office every day to be on hand to deal with any face to face queries. Other members of the team are available by telephone and email as usual. Every Wednesday, we all come into the Civic Offices, allowing us the chance to have a team meeting, catch up on the week's events and brainstorm ideas for projects. This doesn't mean to say the rest of the week we don't speak to each other – far from it, as it's very important we keep our own communications channels open. We regularly talk on the phone, either on a one to one basis or as a conference call. It just goes to show that with the right technology you don't need to be in the same room to have meaningful conversations. In fact, 'meeting' on the phone can often be more productive than a face to face. That's not to say there aren't times when a face to face meeting is more appropriate.

We still have a few problems every now and then such as slow IT or mobile phone reception being patchy. But there aren't any issues we can't overcome. Having the right mindset helps. By working in a smarter way, I believe the organisation is becoming more productive. It is about fitting the work into your hours as opposed to hours into your work.'

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